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**DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE**

# Intelligence Memorandum

*International Narcotics Series No. 10*

*Afghanistan: Opium Production and Trade*

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
April 1972

### INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

#### AFGHANISTAN: OPIUM PRODUCTION AND TRADE

##### Summary

1. Opium poppy cultivation and opium trade, although illegal, are deeply entrenched in Afghanistan. Poppy is grown in various parts of the country, but cultivation is concentrated in the south-central region and in the eastern tribal areas bordering on Pakistan. Opium output probably was about 100 metric tons or more in 1971. Addiction is not a serious problem and domestic consumption is small. Local tribesmen smuggle most of the opium into Iran. There is no evidence that significant amounts of Afghan opium currently are smuggled beyond Iran.

2. Afghanistan is a signatory to the 1961 UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs and prohibits opium production and trafficking. There is, however, little enforcement of existing statutes. Kabul recently has indicated its willingness to cooperate with other nations on narcotics matters and has taken limited steps toward improving enforcement procedures. Progress probably will be slow, however, if only because of Kabul's limited funds and ability to enforce production and trafficking laws. Moreover, the King regards the Pushtun tribes, which grow much of Afghanistan's opium, as important pillars of his political support and is therefore reluctant to move against them.

##### Discussion

##### Production

3. Based on the fragmentary and incomplete information available, Afghan opium production was about 100 tons in 1971 and possibly higher.

Note: This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Economic Research and coordinated within the Directorate of Intelligence and with the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs.

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There is no licit production of poppies or opium derivatives in Afghanistan, nor any indication of illicit processing into morphine base or heroin. Afghanistan is a signatory to the 1961 UN Single Convention, and production and trafficking are proscribed by statute, but Kabul is simply unable to provide adequate enforcement.

4. Poppy is grown in various parts of the country, on small plots – one-quarter hectare or less – almost entirely by Pushtun farmers, and in a variety of soils and climates, ranging from the dryer and lower elevations characteristic of the Helmand valley to the mountainous tribal areas in the northeast. Afghan poppy farmers generally broadcast poppy seed in October and November. Plants mature in 4 to 5 months, including a brief dormancy stage, and lancing the capsule begins in April. In the higher mountain regions where elevations exceed 5,000 feet, poppy growers often delay planting until March. Poppy capsules normally are incised vertically as many as five times during the harvest. In general, lanced capsules are not marketed, but the seeds are collected from the pods and processed into cooking oil.

5. Three principal growing areas account for virtually all opium produced in Afghanistan: the south-central region encompassing Helmand and Qandahar; the region immediately south and east of Kabul (centering on Jalalabad); and the northeast border area (see the map). A small amount of poppy is also cultivated in Herat. Much of the growing area is inaccessible, particularly the more remote northeast tribal areas. Consequently, almost all available data such as yields, area planted, and prices are based on observations made in the Helmand valley and parts of Nangarhar Province.

6. Excluding the Badakhshan area in the tribal northeast, an estimated 1,600 hectares were sown for the 1971 poppy crop. About half the planted area was in the south-central Helmand region, more than two-fifths near Kabul and the Pakistan border, and the remainder in Herat Province. Opium production from these areas was at least 50 tons in 1971. This implies an average yield of about 30 kilograms (kgs) per hectare, somewhat higher than the average in India and considerably higher than reported yields in Turkey and Iran. The reason for such unusually high yields is not known, but it probably results from considerably more moisture and impurities included in the Afghan opium production. Output in Badakhshan Province, the largest of the principal growing areas, probably accounted for an additional 50 tons. The quality of much Afghan opium is poor compared with that of nearby countries. In Afghanistan's settled areas, the morphine content averages only around 8%, with some better quality up to 10%. Morphine content in the more remote tribal areas may average 4% or less, similar to illicit opium produced in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province.

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Helmand Valley Landscape



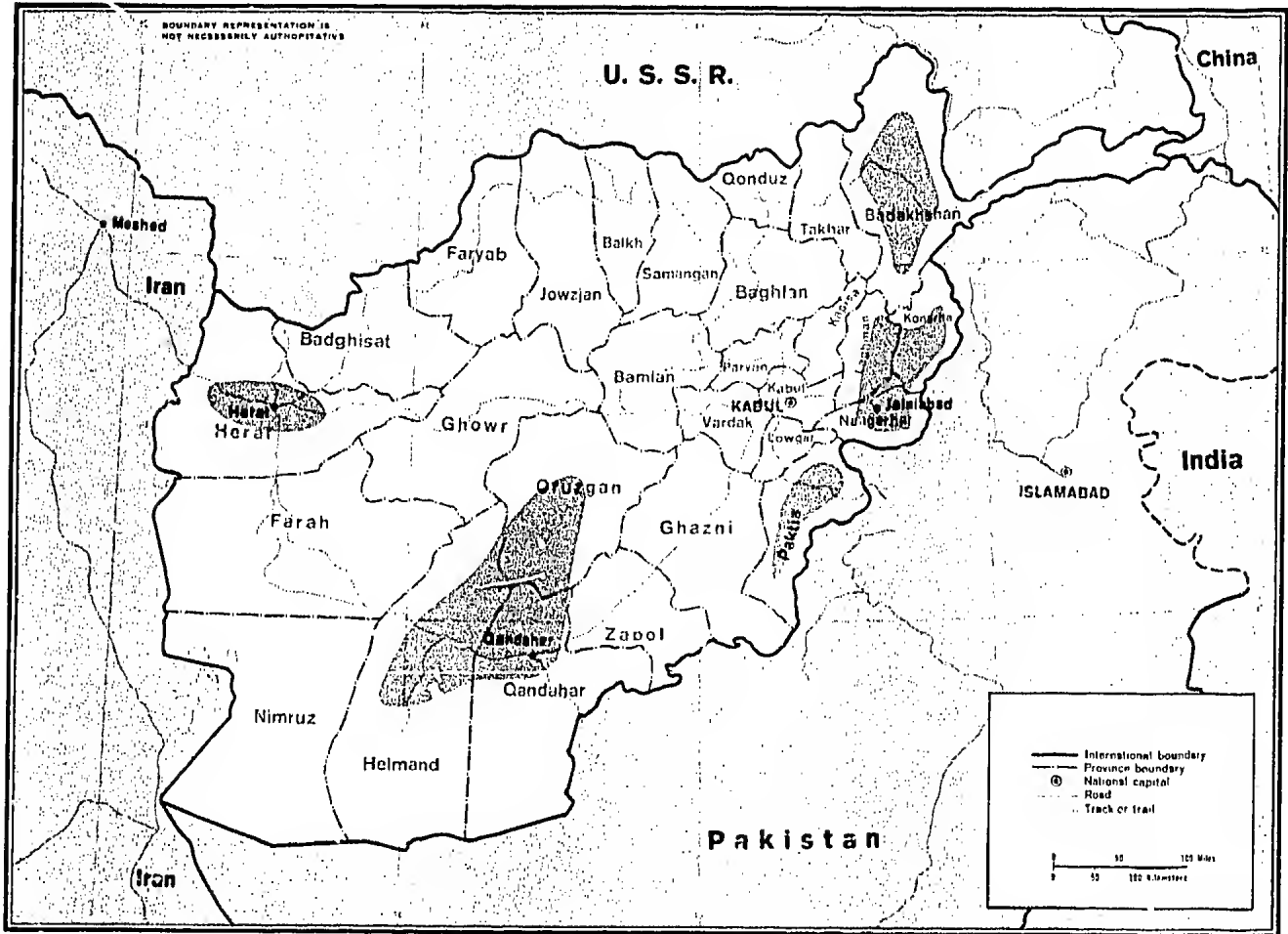
Agricultural Land Near Jalalabad

7. Except for hashish, opium earnings per hectare in Afghanistan exceed those from all other cash crops by a wide margin. Poppy fields yield an average of about 30 kgs of opium latex per hectare and prices average \$10-\$12 per kg, giving the farmer about \$300-\$360 per hectare. This contrasts sharply with gross earnings per hectare from fruit, which

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**Opium Poppy Growing Areas in Afghanistan**



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average about \$175. Hashish, on the other hand, brings as much as \$600 per hectare. Earnings from wheat, the primary food crop, range between \$40 and \$110 per hectare. Most farmers grow wheat despite its lower yield because it requires far less labor time than does poppy and because of the need to produce food for their own consumption in the largely subsistence-oriented economy.

Trade

8. Data are not available on consumption or the size of the addict population, but opium addiction apparently is not a problem. Consumption is confined largely to medical and quasi-medical uses by peasants in the growing areas and to some addicts, largely foreigners, in the cities. Cultural and cost factors have precluded the development of a significant addict population in Afghanistan. Both Islamic and civil law in Afghanistan forbids the use of intoxicants or mind-influencing drugs, a prohibition enforceable by the court system. Moreover, relatively low-priced licitly imported morphine, codeine, and cocaine are readily available in the cities and preferred to the high-priced opium.

9. Illicit opium sales are almost exclusively to Iran, where the large addict population provides a ready market for Afghan opium. The sparsely settled mountain and desert areas in Afghanistan are well suited for smuggling operations. Indeed, smuggling is a way of life in Afghanistan. The population along the Afghan-Iranian border is basically nomadic. Families usually have relatives living on both sides of the border and routinely cross back and forth without official sanction. Moreover, sheep-raising is the tribesmen's main occupation, and they often cross the border with their flocks in search of grazing land. Traffickers have built close relationships with these smugglers over the decades. In addition to paying for lodging, they also bring goods to trade in local markets. Improvements in the road network in the 1960s probably increased trafficking by truck, but tribal caravans still dominate the trade.

10. Growers turn their opium stocks over to clan leaders or landlords who arrange for shipment to Iran. In some areas, however, farmers sell their opium to middlemen - local businessmen and merchants - who contract with tribesmen to deliver the opium to the border area. The tribes most heavily involved in the traffic through Afghanistan to the Iranian border are the Ghilzai (Pushtun), Shinwari (Pushtun), Baluchis, and Turkmen. The Ghilzai carry opium from east-central Afghanistan. Shinwaris operate mainly near the Pakistani border, but probably carry opium into Iran as well. Western portions of the Baluchistan desert are the usual areas of operation for Baluchi caravans, while the Turkmen route is across northern Afghanistan. The major border-crossing area is in the vicinity of the road from Herat, Afghanistan, to Meshed, Iran.

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**CONFIDENTIAL****Mountain Area Near Herat**

11. Lack of an adequate narcotics enforcement effort in Afghanistan has facilitated opium trafficking to Iran over the years. Afghan customs operate only two checkpoints along the 550-mile border. Local officials (mainly poorly paid police and other civil servants susceptible to bribes) actively aid and abet such trafficking. In recent years, however, Iran has tightened border surveillance. Opium seized by Iranian authorities near the Afghan border in 1970 amounted to 12.5 tons, compared with an average of only 7.2 tons in the six previous years. Iran's moves have reportedly led to a shift in border-crossing patterns away from the major routes. Also, caravans are larger and more heavily armed, and the tribesmen, aware that they are likely to be executed if they are caught in Iran, are prepared to offer resistance. Middlemen often hold smugglers' families as hostages to insure they do not surrender to Iranian border forces or fail to return with proceeds from the opium sale. Most of the opium smuggled into Iran from the South Asia region almost certainly originates in Afghanistan, and some probably also transits Afghanistan from northwest Pakistan.

#### Control

12. Poppy cultivation was banned in 1957, and narcotics enforcement activities since then have been vested in the Ministry of Interior in Kabul. A special national enforcement agency was created within the ministry by a 1970 anti-smuggling statute to oversee narcotics violations, but this agency is not yet functioning effectively. Neither the police nor the gendarmerie have been seriously concerned with narcotics matters, and only occasional

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arrests have been made, all for trafficking. Both groups are preoccupied with national security and lack qualified narcotics personnel and adequate facilities. The gendarmerie operate primarily in border areas, but are concentrated at Afghanistan's few border checkpoints. The Customs Department under the Ministry of Finance also has enforcement responsibility in opium matters, but its participation is limited to search and discovery of contraband at border customs stations.

13. Kabul in recent months has indicated a willingness to cooperate with other nations on the opium problem. Two ministerial-level committees were set up in January 1972 to formulate narcotics control programs. One of the committees is charged with supervising social and economic aspects of narcotics control (including cultivation and crop substitution) while the other is responsible for combating illicit traffic and strengthening the police and gendarmerie by upgrading equipment inventories and customs controls. These committees also are to provide liaison with foreign governments and advisers on specific control programs. In February 1972, after a year of negotiations, Kabul acceded to a US request and allowed the establishment of an office of the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs within the US Embassy to cooperate with the Afghan police on narcotics matters.

14. Afghanistan faces economic and political constraints in instituting an effective opium control or eradication program. In some areas, opium provides virtually the only cash income to the farmer. There is no substitute crop - except for hashish - that can be grown under existing agricultural conditions that would at least equal earnings from opium. If cash subsidies are required to induce farmers to cease illicit poppy cultivation, most of the funding for such a program would have to come from outside sources, given Afghanistan's limited resources. Furthermore, with the government's strained resources currently focused on relief of the 1970 and 1971 droughts, it is unlikely that narcotics control will be given much of a priority, especially since Afghanistan does not have a serious addiction problem.

15. The relationships between the King, the parliament, and the tribes present an even greater obstacle to narcotics control. The Pushtun tribal areas in Afghanistan are only nominally administered by the central government. Afghan tribes enjoy special privileges, such as exemption from taxes and conscription, and deal directly with the royal family. The King regards the Pushtun tribes as important pillars of support and would be reluctant to incur their hostility by prohibiting poppy cultivation and opium trade.

16. In any event, Kabul certainly lacks the resources and probably the resolve to combat the opium problem alone. Some aspects of the

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problem such as border enforcement can be resolved most effectively through an international or at least a regional approach. Afghanistan is not a member of INTERPOL and is not actively participating in international groups currently concerned with narcotics matters. In March 1972, Kabul sent an official participant to the Geneva conferences on amending the 1961 Single Convention, but the delegate served largely in an observer capacity and showed little real interest in cooperating on narcotics problems. Until some meaningful agreement is achieved with its neighbors, there probably is little Afghanistan can do to improve the situation.

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